

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 12170

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, TH, OVIP (MONDALE, WALTER)
SUBJECT: RTG VIEWS ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND FOR
INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT

1. SUMMARY: THE BANGKOK POST AND THE NATION OF APRIL
26 BOTH CARRIED STORIES INDICATING THAT THE RTG WAS
CONSIDERING A POLICY OF LOCAL SETTLEMENT FOR SOME OF
THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES NOW IN THAILAND. THE POST
ARTICLE SPECULATED INCORRECTLY THAT THE REFUGEES MIGHT
EVENTUALLY ACQUIRE CITIZENSHIP. A KEY THAI OFFICIAL
INDICATED THAT THE ARTICLE GIVES A FALSE SENSE OF
IMMINENCE ABOUT THE PROPOSALS, AND THAT ANY GRANTING
OF CITIZENSHIP IS UNLIKELY IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.
THE OFFICIAL MADE A STRONG APPEAL FOR GREATER U.S.
AND THIRD COUNTRY ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES IF THAILAND
IS TO BE ABLE TO LOCALLY SETTLE THE REMAINDER. HE
INDICATED SUCH A REQUEST TO THE U.S. MIGHT BE MADE
DURING THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE BANGKOK POST ARTICLE - HEADLINED "REFUGEES
TO GET THAI CITIZENSHIP?" - INDICATED THAT THE RTG
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IS CONSIDERING A POLICY OF GRANTING CITIZENSHIP TO
INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. THE POLICY WOULD APPLY TO
THOSE WHO PROVE TO BE "LOYAL AND HONEST TO THE
KINGDOM, HAVE GOOD BEHAVIOR, HAVE DONE USEFUL DEEDS
TOWARD THE COUNTRY AND HAVE OTHER QUALIFICATIONS THAT
MEET THE REQUIREMENTS." THE ARTICLE STATES THAT THE NATIONAL
SECURITY COUNCIL HAS YET TO APPROVE THIS POLICY LINE,

WHICH IS BASED ON THE REALIZATION THAT RESETTLEMENT ABROAD WILL NOT ACCOMMODATE ALL OF THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES NOW IN THAILAND. PROVIDING INCENTIVES TO THE REMAINING REFUGEES TO BE LOYAL TO THE KINGDOM WOULD THUS BE A MORE RATIONAL POLICY THAN TO CONTINUE TO TREAT THEM AS

DISPLACED PERSONS. THE ARITILCE NOTED THAT THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND, MAJOR GENERAL FUNGCHALOEI ANIRUTTHEWA, WOULD CHAIR A MEETING TO WORK OUT THE DETAILS OF THE POLICY.

3. EMBASSY OFFICERS MET WITH FUNGCHALOEI THE EVENING OF APRIL 26 TO GET HIS VIEWS. HE MAINTAINS THAT THE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE IS INACCURATE AND THAT THE PRIMARY STUMBLING BLOCK TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT REMAINS THE FACT THAT THE LAND REFUGEE POPULATION IS GROWING. UNLESS THIRD COUNTRY ACCEPTANCE RATES BEGIN TO BALANCE THE INFLUX, THE RTG WILL BE FORCED TO TAKE HARSHER MEASURES ALONG ITS FRONTIERS. THAILAND RECOGNIZES THAT LOCAL SETTLEMENT FOR SOME REFUGEES WILL BE REQUIRED BUT STILL BELIEVES THAT THIS SOLUTION WILL ONLY BE POSSIBLE FOR SOME 20,000 OF THEM.

4. FUNGCHALOEI EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE IMMINENT AMERICAN PROGRAM, BUT INDICATED THAT 12,500 LAND
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REFUGEE ACCEPTANCES WOULD NOT PERMIT THE RTG TO MOVE WITH ANY RAPIDITY TOWARD LOCAL SETTLEMENT. HE MENTIONED THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE RTG MIGHT REQUEST AN ADDITIONAL ONE-TIME U.S. AND THIRD COUNTRY COMMITMENT TO ACCEPT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES AS AN INCENTIVE TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND. THE RTG MAY RAISE THIS ISSUE DURING THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT.

COMMENT: FUNGCHALOEI WAS OPEN AND CANDID IN DISCUSSING THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY IN THE RTG BUREAUCRACY ON REFUGEE LOCAL SETTLEMENT. UNLIKE SENIOR MOI OFFICIALS, FUNGCHALOEI WAS QUITE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE REFUGEE SITUATION SERIOUSLY. MOREOVER, THE FACT THAT RTG HAS FORMED AN INTERAGENCY LOCAL SETTLEMENT COMMITTEE IS AT LEAST A MONOR STEP FORWARD

6. HOWEVER, FUNGCHALOEI IN ESSENCE CONVEYED THE SAME HARD LIKE VIEWS AS HAVE GOTTEN BEFORE FROM SENIOR THAI OFFICIALS CONNECTED WITH THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. HE DID NOT INDICATE ANY REAL GIVE IN THE RTG POSITION ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT AND AS WE EXPECTED, LINKED ANY RTG RESETTLEMENT EFFORT TO SUBSTANTIAL INCREASED ACCEPTANCE OF REF-

UGEES BY THE USG AND OTHERS. FYI, THE NUMBER OF
20,000 IN OUR OPINION UNDERSTATES THE ACTUAL THAI
CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT. ON THE
OTHER HAND, THE 100,000 CURRENTLY ON HAND STRIKES THE
RTG AS TOO OVERWHELMING A NUMBER TO HANDLE. END FYI

7. OF IMMEDIATE IMPORTANCE, FUNGCHALOEI'S COMMENTS
WERE ANOTHER INDICATION THAT RTG WORKING LEVELS DO
WANT PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK TO MAKE AN APPROACH
TO THE VICE PRESIDENT WITH REGARD TO SIGNIFICANTLY IN-
CREASED USG ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES IN THAILAND, BOTH
LAND AND BOAT CASES.
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